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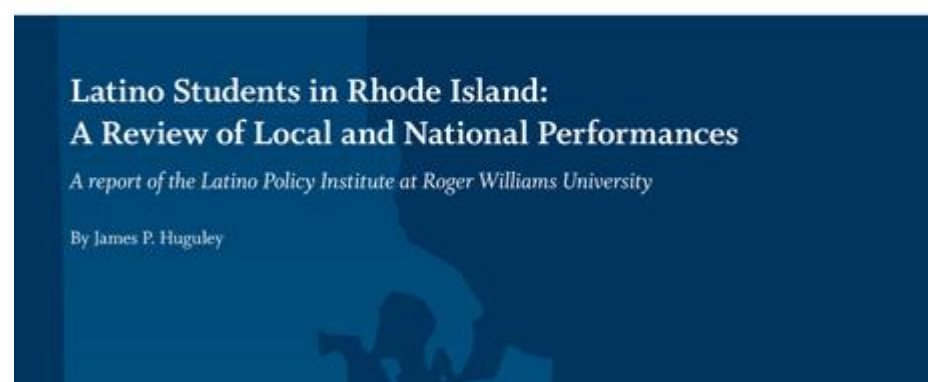
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LPI Research: RI Latino Youth Grade Levels Behind Peers

RWU's Latino Policy Institute releases new research report and recommendations for delivering academic excellence in Urban Public Schools



August 27, 2013 | Public Affairs Staff

PROVIDENCE, R.I., – Nearly three out of four students in Rhode Island's urban communities are Latino and while this demographic continues to grow, most local urban public schools are failing to meet the unique needs of their populations. The [Latino Policy Institute](#) (LPI) at Roger Williams University reveals new research today that shows local Latino students, in addition to being the majority of the student population in Providence and Central Falls Schools, score two to three grade levels behind their white peers in reading and math. With these findings, LPI urges local policy makers and K-12 education leaders to begin to address the systemic impediments to achieving high academic performance for this diverse student body, among a series of other recommendations for better serving Rhode Island's Latino student population and educating the state's future workforce.

The research report, "Latino Students in Rhode Island: A Review of Local and National Performances," found that the Latino-white achievement gap in Rhode Island is among the 10 worst in the country. When tested on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), Latino students in the state score two to three grade levels behind their white classmates in mathematics and one to two grade levels behind in reading. Moreover, Latinos in Rhode Island test one-half to one full grade level behind their Latino peers across the country on several measures. The report reveals Rhode Island ranks as low as 40th and 41st among states in Latino student performance.

Socio-economic conditions, current urban school challenges, and the inefficiency of the English Language Learner programming in Rhode Island are among the key factors impacting Latino student achievement, according to the report. Latinos make up 75 percent of the English Language Learners (ELLs) in the state, which are students learning

English as a second language in general education classrooms. ELLs in Rhode Island are among some of the lowest performing in the nation. In 8th grade mathematics, local ELL students ranked last when compared to fellow ELL students in the United States.

“We are working in Providence to ensure that every student is prepared to succeed on the first day of kindergarten and throughout their academic career,” said Providence Mayor Angel Taveras. “The Latino Policy Institute’s findings are an important reminder of the urgency we face in improving educational outcomes for all of our young people. I am confident that our schools will continue to develop supports and programming to better educate and meet the unique needs of our students.”

In addition to its key findings and recommendations, the report notes several local key reform efforts in Central Falls and Providence that have improved overall student performance through parent engagement and other proactive practices. Central Falls High School, for example, has improved its graduation rates, increasing 17 percent in 2011 in addition to cutting its dropout rate substantially from 34 percent to 9 percent. School leaders in Providence have also taken proactive steps to explore the challenges facing ELL students.

“The challenges facing Latino youth in our local urban schools have not gone unnoticed,” says Superintendent of Central Falls schools, Dr. Frances Gallo. “The District currently requires all new hires to be steeped in teaching strategies for second language learners. The District’s goal is for 100 percent of our veteran teachers to be fully certified in second language learner instruction within five years. Now is the time for us to apply these same strategies across the urban school districts so that we are better serving all of our youth today.”

To drive broader successful outcomes across Rhode Island’s urban school districts such as Central Falls, Pawtucket and Providence, the Latino Policy Institute released the following seven recommendations in the report:

- Re-envision ELL programming and instruction in core urban school districts
- Improve ELL programming in the core urban school districts through the creation of a state-wide inter-district ELL task force to leverage and centralize best practices
- Orient the Rhode Island Department of Education more explicitly toward racial equity and ELL student performance
- Increase the number of teachers and administrators with social backgrounds similar to Latino students
- Create professional development initiatives that utilize the great work of local schools that are currently succeeding with urban Latino and ELL populations
- Focus on developing school cultures that foster relationships and personalized educational experiences for students
- Ensure state-of-the-art instruction and instructional leadership in the core urban school districts, for all students, schools and classrooms

“While these findings are daunting, we can use this new research on the challenges facing Latino student achievement to create a new state-wide, comprehensive approach for educating our Latino students and to support the schools and districts that serve them,” says LPI Director Anna Cano Morales. “Addressing Latino student achievement is critical to the future health of our workforce, economy and the state.”

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